CARAMEL DOLL

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

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BY

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

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TRANSLATORS' NOTE

Abanindranath Tagore is best known outside Bengal as the leader of that movement which has come to be regarded as the Renaissance of our art. A painter of inexhaustible fancy, his delicate colours depict many themes in many styles.

But our concern here is with Abanindranath the master of Bengali prose. He is the author of a number of important essays on the subject of Art and of some of our first prose-poems. His book on the Homely Rituals of Bengal is a landmark in the study of the patterns of Indian culture. He has written a number of superb extravaganza, serious but highly fanciful, for example the book called *Pathey-Bipathey,* which contains also the best essay on Konarak. The Sheer luxury of his prose, both in rhythm and in fancy, has no parallel in Bengal. His books for children bear the same stamp of his genius. They are rich in imagination and, at the same time, they are racy and colloquial, full of the air of the old Bengal village. Abanindranath revels in the tradition which our peasants and our women have carried on through generations. Folk-tales, rituals, village arts, nursery rhymes, the very turn and twist of the language of our people, all find an almost Joycean meeting-place in Abanindranath's abounding fancy and zest for life.

That his works can never be adequately translated, at least by them, the translators realise. For example the assumption of the world of Bengali folk-tales makes for the whole charm of *Caramel Doll,* and the purple patch of the book appears towards the end where Abanindranath weaves long magical sentences which give new shapes to the nursery rhymes that are universally known in Bengal, but beyond the scope of any translation.

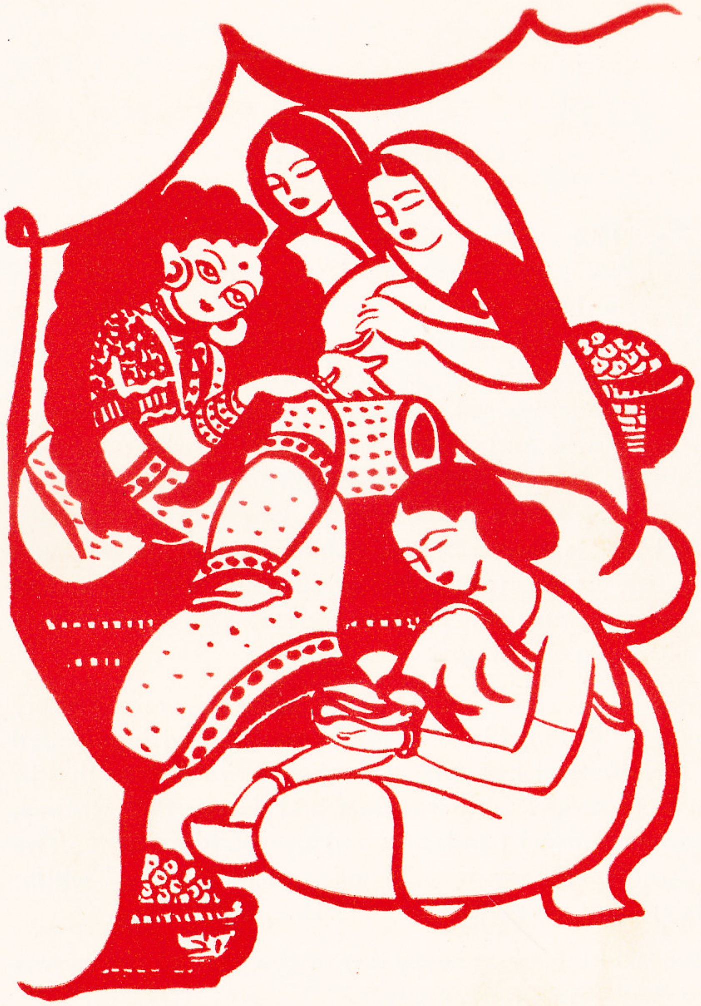
P. D.
B. D.

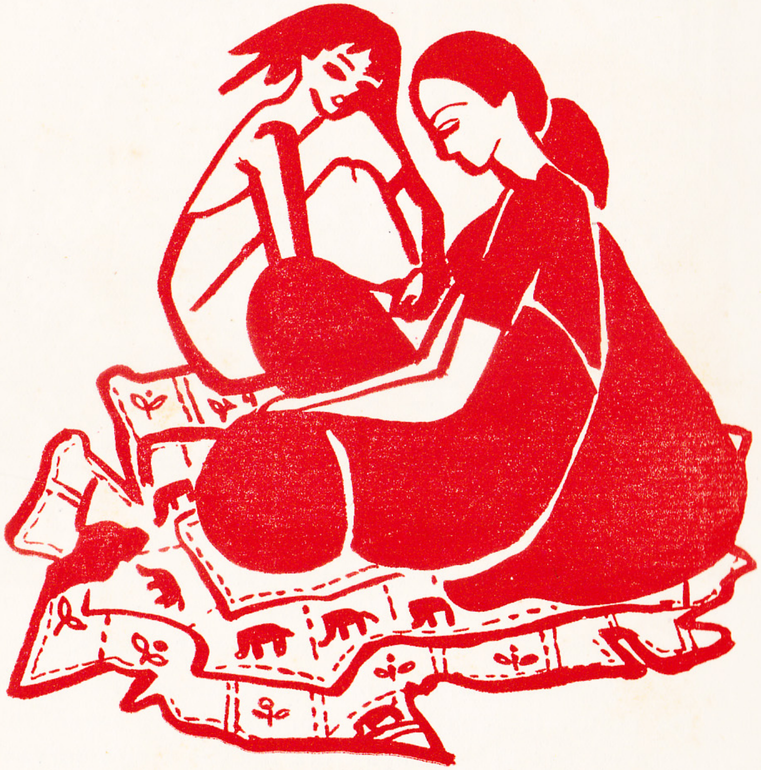
CARAMEL DOLL

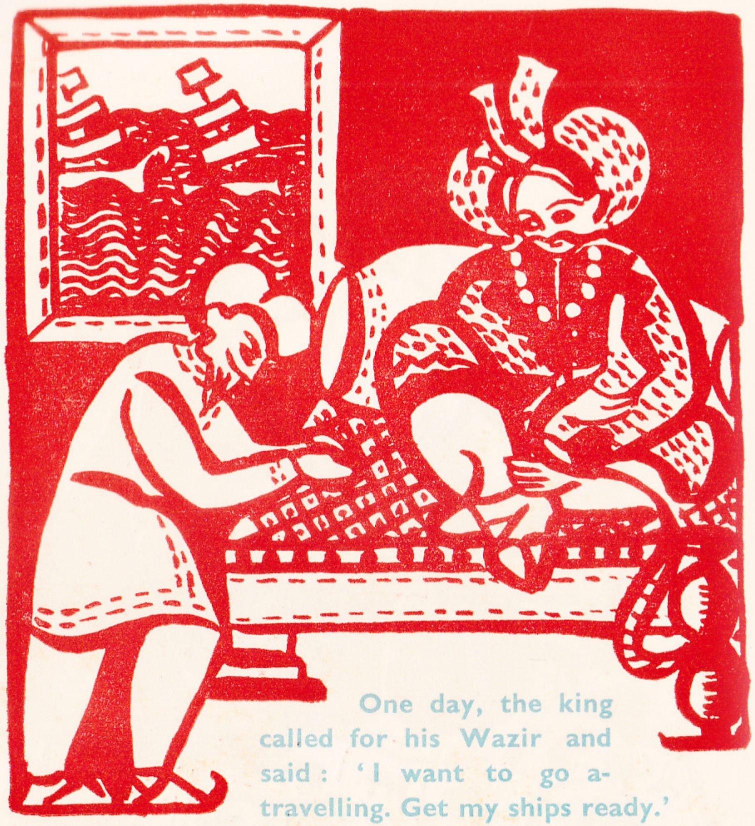
ONCE upon a time there was a king who had two queens—Suo Rani the favourite and Duo Rani the forlorn. In the royal household the favourite queen was regally looked after. She had a seven-mansioned palace all to herself. Seven hundred maids waited on her, washed her feet, painted them with alta and dressed her hair. Seven baskets of flowers plucked from seven gardens came for her every day and Suo Rani strung them into garlands. She had jewels stored in seven chests, the pride of seven kings. She would take the ornaments out now and then and put them on. And, of course, she was as dear as life itself to the king.

And Duo Rani, the elder queen, was greatly neglected. The king himself looked upon her with poisoned eyes. He allowed her only a broken-down hut to live in and a servant-girl who was deaf and dumb. For clothes, she had a torn sari ; and for a bed a threadbare quilt. The king came to her room only once a year, sat for a while, barely spoke a word or two, and then went away.

But the king came every day of the year to the rooms of Suo Rani, the younger queen.







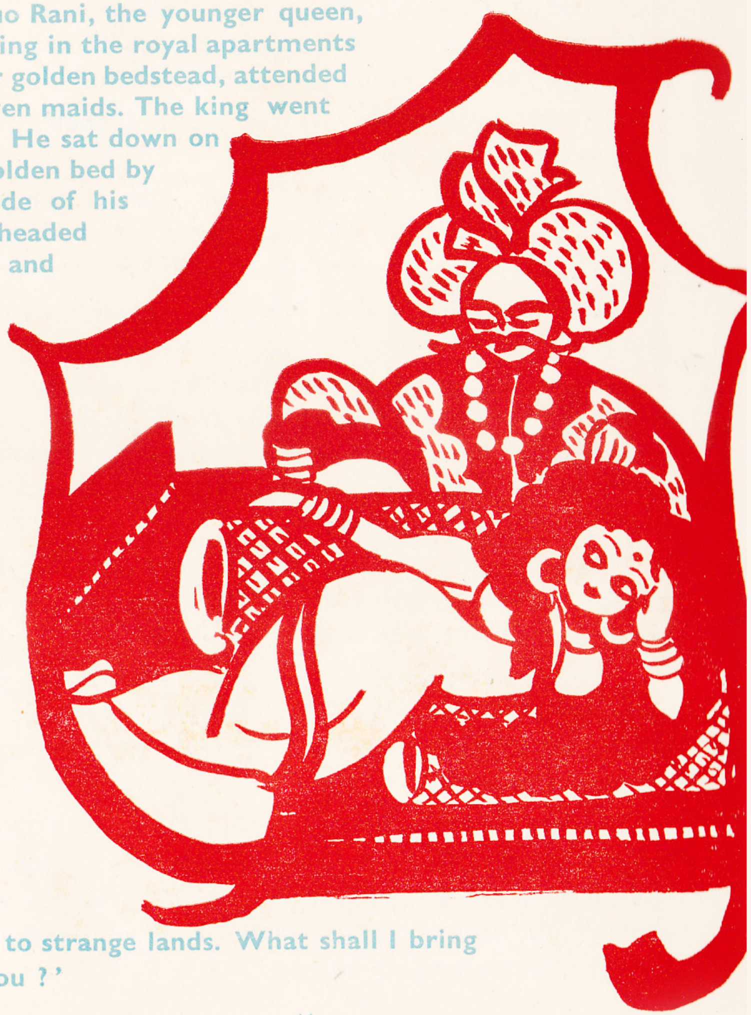
One day, the king called for his Wazir and said: 'I want to go a-travelling. Get my ships ready.'

At the bidding of the king, the Wazir went to get the ships ready. It took seven months to get seven ships decorated. Six of the ships were for the king's servants, and the king himself had a golden ship with a golden pavilion on deck.

The Wazir came and announced: 'My Lord, the ships are ready.'

The king said: 'Very well, I start to-morrow.' And the Wazir went back home.

Suo Rani, the younger queen, was lying in the royal apartments on her golden bedstead, attended by seven maids. The king went there. He sat down on the golden bed by the side of his curly-headed queen and said:



'I go to strange lands. What shall I bring for you?'

The queen turned the diamond bracelets round and round on her butter-soft arms, and said : ‘ Diamonds don’t show up on my fair arms and make my wrists seem bare. Oh, I wish I could get eight pairs of bracelets of blood-red rubies. I would love to wear them.’

The king said : ‘My lovely Rani, I shall get you bracelets of rubies from Rubyland.’

The queen’s feet moved as in a dance, her anklets jingled, and she said : ‘ These anklets don’t ring true ; I wish I could get ten pairs of anklets of flaming gold.’

The king said : ‘ I shall bring golden anklets for your feet from Goldland.’

The queen looked at her necklace of elephant-pearls and said : ‘ Look, Raja, look how small these pearls are. I have heard that there is a kingdom where there are pearls as large as pigeon’s eggs. Bring me a necklace of those pearls.’

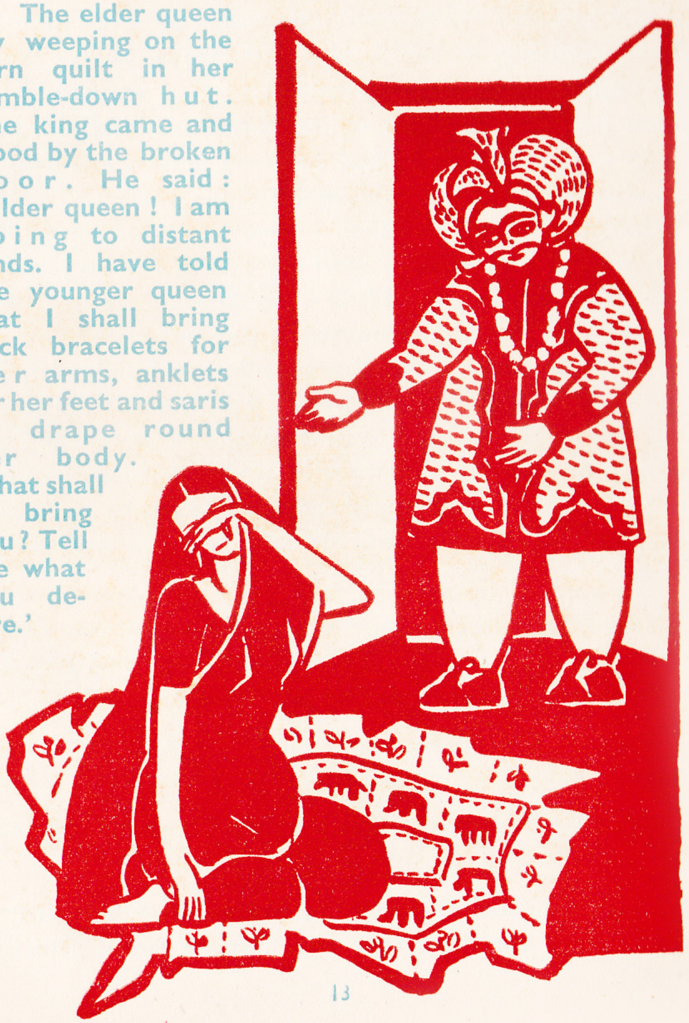
The king said : ‘ The Kingdom of Pearls lies in the middle of the biggest ocean. I shall bring you a necklace from there. What else would you like ? ’

The favourite drew up her golden sari on her golden body and said : ‘This is not a sari but a sack ! Ah ! It would be so nice to wear a sari as blue as the sky, as light as air and as smooth as water !’

The king said : ‘ Oh, my poor lovely queen ! The gold border has bruised your golden skin and it has hurt your butter-soft body ! But say good-bye to me with a smile, my darling, and I shall bring you a sky-blue, air-light, water-smooth sari.’

The younger queen said good-bye to the king with a smile. When the king was going to board the ship he suddenly remembered the unhappy Duo Rani.

The elder queen lay weeping on the torn quilt in her tumble-down hut. The king came and stood by the broken door. He said : ‘ Elder queen ! I am going to distant lands. I have told the younger queen that I shall bring back bracelets for her arms, anklets for her feet and saris to drape round her body. What shall I bring you ? Tell me what you desire.’



The queen said : 'My only desire is that you come back safe and sound. When I had your love I could indulge in all sorts of desires and fancies. I longed to wear a golden sari and to sit on my throne surrounded by seven hundred ladies-in-waiting, under a thousand lamps, in my seven-mansioned palace with the seven courts. I wanted to put golden bells on the feet of my two love-birds in their golden cage. My king ! I had so many fancies and desires. But what should I do now with golden saris and golden ornaments ? For whom shall I wear diamond bracelets ? Or a necklace of pearls round my throat ? Or a jewelled pendant on my forehead ? O king, those days are over. You want to give me ornaments, but not that love, nor that palace with the seven courts and seven hundred maids. I could have a bird from the woods, but where is the golden cage, my king ? Thieves would steal the jewellery from my broken-down hut and no wild bird would stay in a broken cage. Maharaj, go to her to whom you have given your love and fulfil her desires. Not for me are such empty wishes.'

The Raja said : ' No, Rani, that won't do. People will blame me when they hear I have neglected you. Tell me what you want.'

She said : ' It is absurd to talk of ornaments for me, Maharaj. Just bring me a cinder-faced monkey. '

The king then said : ' All right, Rani, I'll now take your leave. '

Then the elder queen flung herself on her torn quilt and, sobbing bitterly, bade the king farewell. The king

went to board his ship.

At sunset the golden ship unfurled its golden sails and, cutting through the fathomless blue waters of the sea like a golden cloud, floated away towards the western sky.

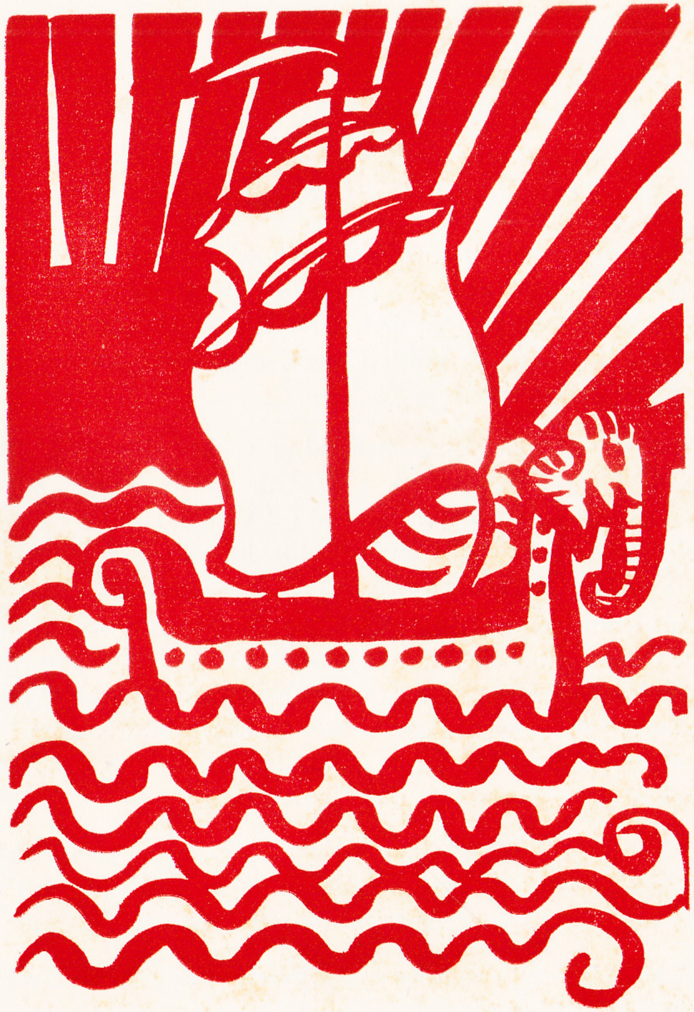
And Duo Rani lay on her torn quilt in her broken-down hut, her eyes fixed on the azure sea.

In her seven-mansioned palace, surrounded by her seven hundred attendants, the favourite Suo Rani thought of her ornaments, listened to the song of the golden bird in the golden cage, and went to sleep on her golden bedstead.

Aboard his ship, the king forgot his sad Duo Rani. He remembered only the smiling face of his younger queen and wondered : ' What is my beloved doing now ? Perhaps she is plucking flowers from her seven gardens. Or perhaps she is making garlands of flowers from the seven gardens. I am sure she is thinking of me ; and I expect her eyes are filled with tears ; and her garland remains unfinished ; and the gold thread and the flower baskets lie there neglected at her feet ; and she will sit through the whole night ; and sleep will not touch the eyes of my beloved.'

For, Suo Rani, the younger queen, was all the king could think about. Duo Rani, the older queen, pined for the king, but never once did he think of her.

In this way, the king spent twelve months aboard his ship on the high seas.



During the thirteenth month, the king came to the land of rubies. In Rubyland, everything was made of rubies —the walls of the houses were of rubies ; the paved steps running down to the bathing ghats and lakes were of rubies ; the very pebbles on the roads were rubies. The king had bracelets made for Suo Rani in Rubyland—eight pairs of bracelets, made of eight thousand rubies so red that when one put them on, it seemed as if a fountain of blood were gushing forth from the body.

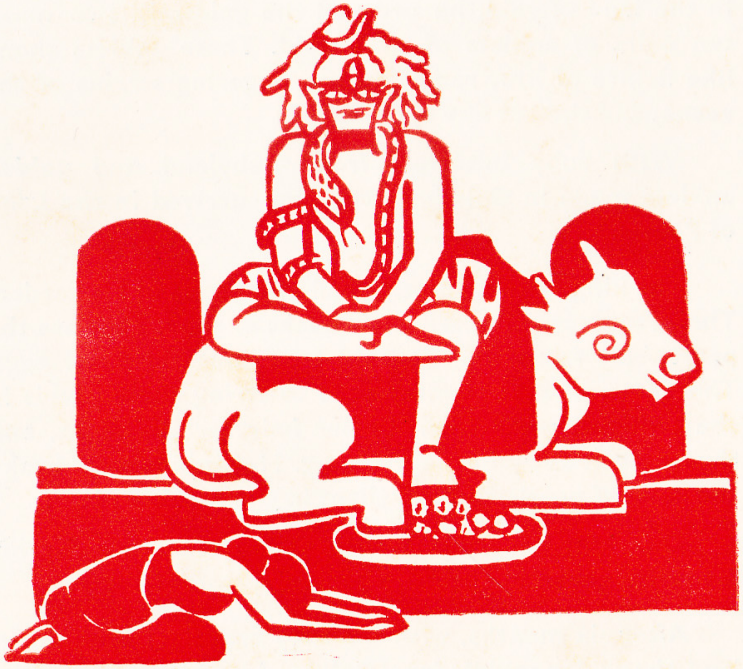
With the ruby bracelets, the king came to Goldland. In the land of gold, he ordered the goldsmiths to make ten pairs of anklets of solid gold. These anklets shone like flames of fire, rang like the lingering strains of the veena, and tinkled like cymbals.

With ruby bracelets from Rubyland and golden anklets made in Goldland, the king arrived in the Land of Pearls.

The king of that country had two doves in his garden. Their feet were of pearl, their beaks of ruby. They ate the pearl fruit from the emerald tree and laid pearl eggs. The queen of that country used to string these pearls in the twilight, wear them in her hair for the night, and throw them away in the morning. Her maids would take the cast-off pearls and sell them in the market place.

Our king bought one such string of pearls for his favourite queen in exchange for a shipload of silver.

After six months, with the ruby bracelets from Rubyland, the golden anklets from Goldland, and the pearl necklace from Pearlland, the king came to another country. In a grove belonging to the princess of that kingdom, blue silk-worms, feeding on the turquoise leaves of the sapphire tree, spun cocoons as smooth as water, as light as air and as blue as the sky. The king's daughter would sit through the night, weave a sari of that azure silk, matching it with the colour of the sky. It took her six months to weave a single sari. Then the princess would wear that sari, blue as the sky, light as air, smooth as water, and would worship Shiva, the great god with the blue throat.



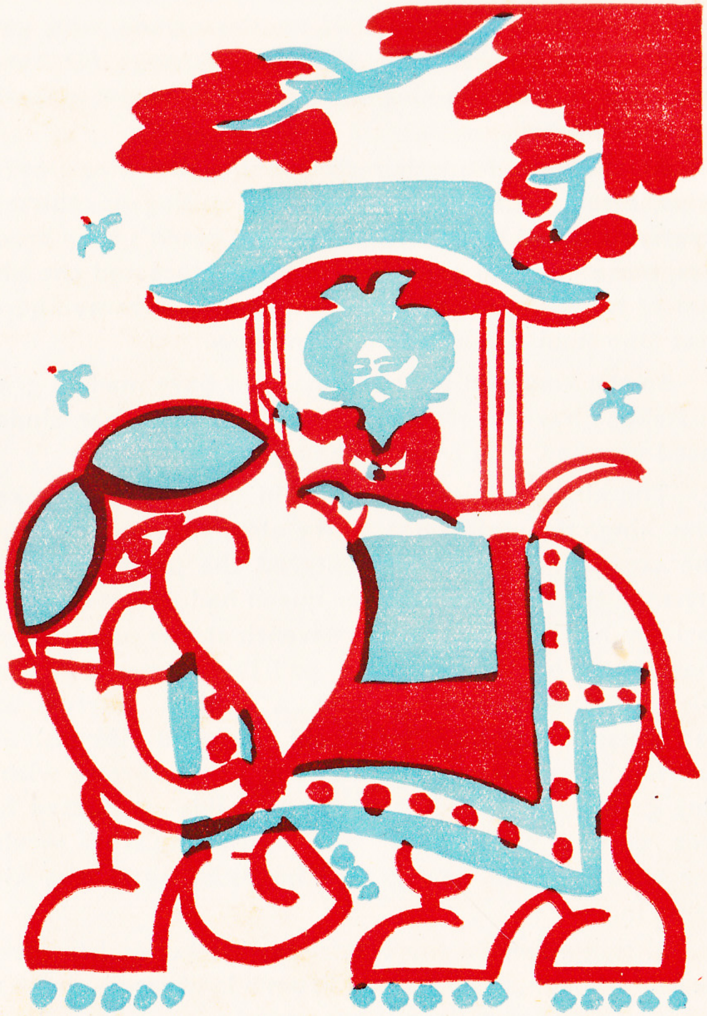
On returning home, she would cast off the sari and her maids-in-waiting would sell it to the person who gave them seven shiploads of gold. In exchange for seven shiploads of gold, the king bought for his favourite queen her desired sari.

At the end of another six months, the king's seven ships, after crossing seven seas and sailing up thirteen rivers, returned home with the young queen's ruby bracelets, her anklets of gold, her pearl necklace and the blue sari of her choice. Then the king suddenly remembered that Duo Rani had asked for a monkey.

So the king said to the Wazir : 'I have made a great mistake ; I have forgotten to bring Duo Rani her cinder-faced monkey. You must go and get one.'

The king's minister went off in search of a monkey. The king, mounted on a white elephant, rode through the crowded highway and entered the palace with the ornaments which the younger queen had coveted and the sari she had fancied. On the seventh storey of her seven-mansioned house, Suo Rani had just parted her hair with a golden comb before a golden mirror and had dressed her hair with gold pins and ribbons. She painted a vermillion spot between her eyebrows with a tiny golden rod, put kohl on her eyelids and tinted her feet red with alta. As her ladies-in-waiting were serving her with trays of flowers and boxes of betel, the king came in.

Sitting down on the crystal throne beside his queen, he said : 'Look, my beloved ! From a land where the market-places and the strands are paved with rubies, I have



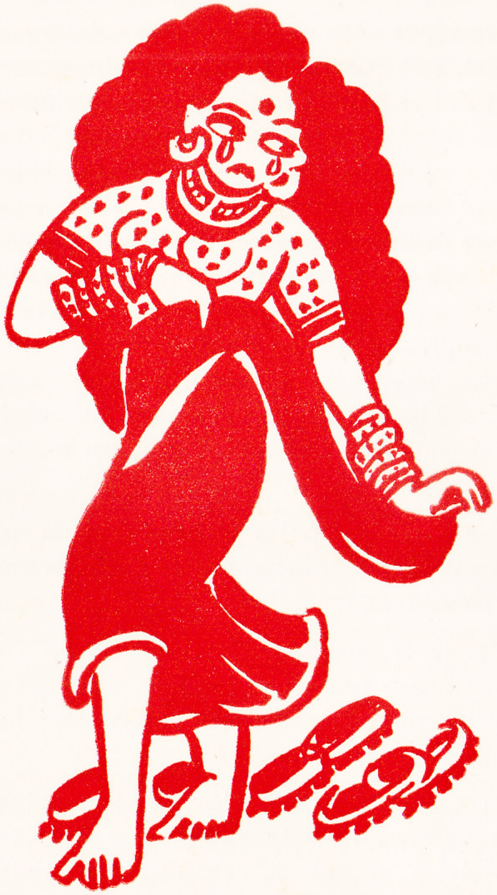
brought you bracelets for your arms. In the Kingdom of Pearls there are two birds with pearl legs and ruby beaks that lay eggs of pearl. The queen of that land strings those pearls, wears them in her hair in the evening and throws them away in the morning ! I have brought you a string of those pearls. In another kingdom, a princess, after spinning seven reels of thread from one cocoon of silk, sits on the terrace of her palace in the deep silence of the night and weaves a sari which takes six months to finish. She wears it to go and worship in the temple and takes it off on her return home. Queen, from the kingdom of that princess, in exchange for seven shiploads of gold, I have brought you her royal sari. Just look at it. I've searched the world over for these ornaments and this sari. Put them on and see how lovely you look.'

The queen tried the eight pairs of bracelets on her arms. But the gem-studded bracelets were so loose that they slid up to her shoulders.

She then tried the ten pairs of anklets on her feet. The golden anklets were much too large for her lovely pink feet. She had barely moved two steps before the ten pairs of anklets rolled off on to the floor.

Anxiously, the queen fastened the pearl necklace round her throat. But the pearl necklace from the Kingdom of Pearls was too tight for her. It cut into the tender flesh of her neck and the queen was hurt.

She draped the much-longed-for sari round her body in seven folds. The blue sari of gossamer silk was too small for her. Tears welled up in the eyes of the queen.



Then the offended young queen angrily took off the eight pairs of bracelets set with eight thousand gems, kicked aside the ten pairs of anklets of solid gold, threw off the pearl necklace and cast off the precious sari, saying: 'Ugly ornaments! Horrid sari! Did you have those bracelets made from pebbles picked up in the streets? Were those anklets made from the dust of some distant land? Shame upon you! Whose second-hand pearl necklace is this? And whose cast-off sari is that! I hate it! I feel ashamed to wear it! Take them away, king; I have no use for a worn-out sari and cast-aside ornaments!'

The queen went off in a rage to the Chamber of Angry Moods and locked herself in. And the king, with a downcast face, went to his Council Room with the ornaments and the sari that he had bought in exchange for the seven shiploads of gold.

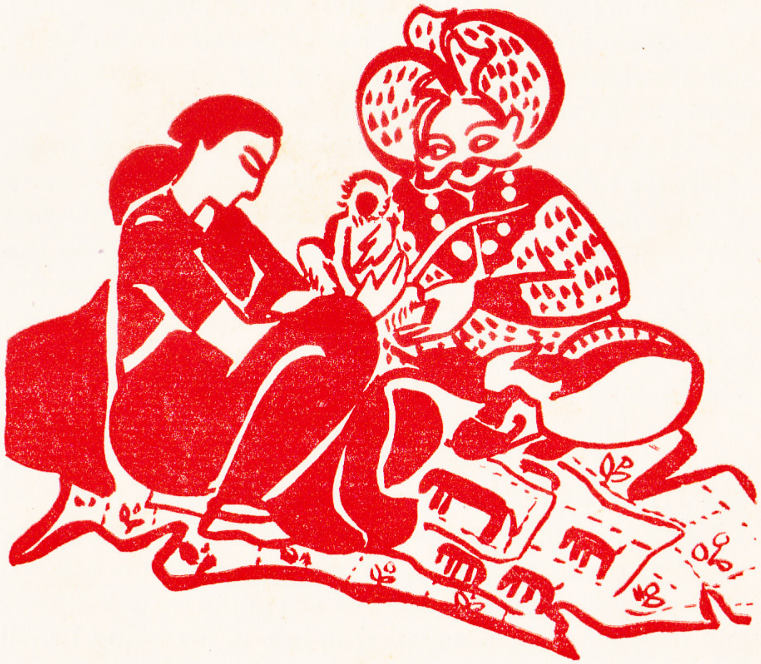
Seated beside the royal throne was the king's minister, waiting for the king. After having searched all the fields and roads of the kingdom, the shops and market-places, he had bought for a cracked cowrie a baby monkey brought in a merchant's ship from some magic land.

The king came and said sadly: 'Wazir, it amazes me! I brought some ornaments made to the queen's measure and a sari woven by a princess, for my young queen but neither the sari nor the ornaments fit her!'

At that instant, the monkey from the woods made obeisance to the king and said: 'Only the very fortunate and virtuous can wear charmed jewellery and a charmed sari from magic lands, for they have been woven by the daughters of the gods and strung by the daughters of the king of serpents. O Maharaj, keep all these precious things by in your royal treasure-house; give them to her to wear who shall be your son's bride.'

The king was surprised at the monkey's words. Smiling, he said to the minister: 'Wazir, just listen to this monkey. I haven't got a son so how can I think of a bride for him? Order new jewellery for the young queen at the goldsmith's and new saris from the weaver. Put by these ornaments and this sari in the treasure-house and if ever I bring a daughter-in-law to my house I shall bestow them on her.'

The Wazir went to the goldsmith's shop to have new ornaments made for the young queen, while the king went to the elder queen with the monkey in his arms. The sorrowful queen wiped his feet with the torn end of her sari and spread out the tattered kantha for him to sit on and said : 'Maharaj, take your seat on this torn quilt in my tumble-down hut, for what else have I to offer you ? Alas ! great king, it is sad that when you return after such a long time I, poor miserable creature, should only have a tattered quilt for you to sit on.'



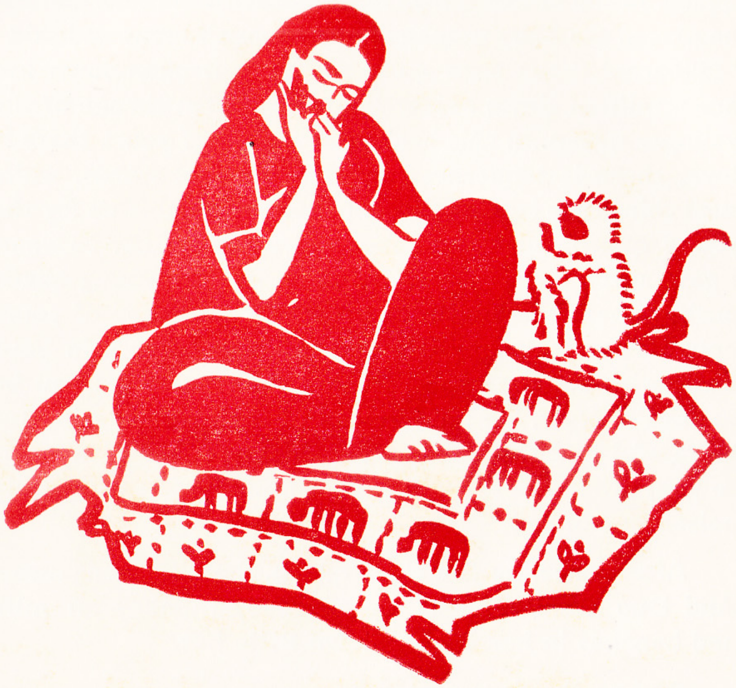
Tears came into the king's eyes at these words of the queen. In the broken-down hut, seated on the torn kantha, he placed the baby monkey in the queen's arms and said : 'Maharani, your torn quilt and your broken-down hut are a million times better than the golden throne of the younger queen. In this broken-down hut of yours there is love, there is tenderness and a few sweet words, while such things are lacking there. I brought ornaments for the young queen's arms and feet and a sari for her to wear. I gave seven ships of gold for them but the young queen pushed them away with her feet. This monkey of yours only cost a cracked cowrie and you have taken it in your arms with so much love. Rani, I shall never let you be sad again. Now, bid me farewell ; I shall come again. But be careful that the young queen does not hear of my visit to you, otherwise she will stop at nothing. She will surely poison one of us !'

After consoling the elder queen, the king went away. And Duo Rani brought up the baby monkey on milk and bananas in her broken-down little hut.

And so the days passed by.

Suo Rani lived in her seven-mansioned palace with its seven courts, surrounded by her seven hundred maidens. And Duo Rani spent her days on the torn quilt in that broken-down hut with the monkey in her lap.

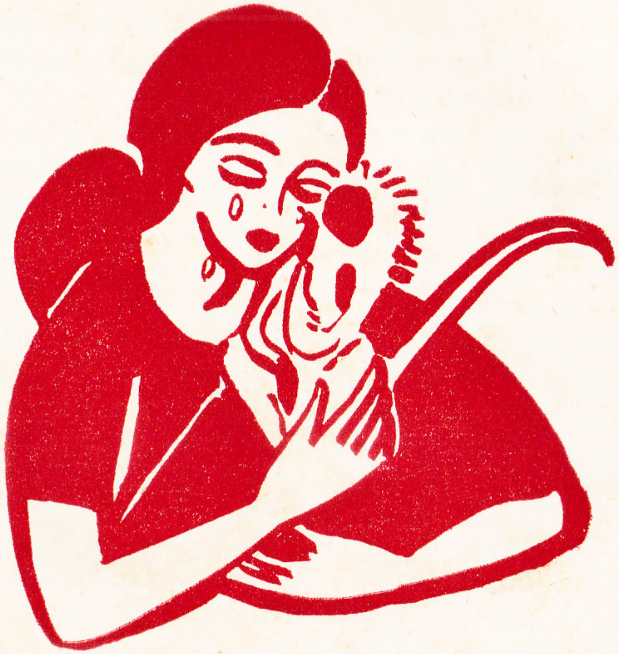
Day after day, month after month, year after year passed in this way. The elder queen still had to put up with coarse rice, coarsely woven saris and the hard floor ; and the only companion in her loneliness was the monkey



from the wilds. And, as usual, she looked at the seven-mansioned palace, with the seven courts and seven gardens which belonged to Suo Rani, and she wept. Whenever the monkey looked at the elder queen he saw tears in her eyes—never once did he see her smile. One day, the monkey said : ' Tell me, mother, why do you weep ? What makes you so sad ? Why do you look towards the palace and weep, mother ? Who lives there ? '

The queen said : 'My little one, I lived there once. I had a seven-courted mansion with seven hundred attendants, seven chests full of ornaments and seven gardens. But, my precious little one, now the young queen lives in that seven-courted palace. This ogress has lured my king away from me. She has robbed me of my seven-courted palace and my seven hundred handmaidens and seven chests full of ornaments. And she lives happily in the golden palace set in the midst of gardens full of flowers. And the greatest of my treasures—my king—she has stolen from me. She has made me a beggar in the streets. Oh, my precious little monkey, I think my heart will break. I was a king's daughter and a king's bride. I was given seven hundred attendants, a seven-courted palace. And I had a royal husband after my own heart. Everything I could wish for was mine and yet who knows by what curse I was prevented from placing a lovely moon-faced prince in the king's arms. Alas ! I do not know what sins I must have committed in my past lives nor how many people I must have wronged. How many desires must I have thwarted and how many mothers' hearts must I have wrung, so that I have had to hand over my golden house to the younger queen, to have dust and ashes thrown on my queenly pride ? Why have I lost my husband's love and the hope of a prince? Why have I had to become more wretched than a beggar in the streets. My little one, I must be made of stone or else how could I suffer such humiliations, such agony in my heart and still continue to live ? '

As she told the tale of her sorrows, the queen's cheeks



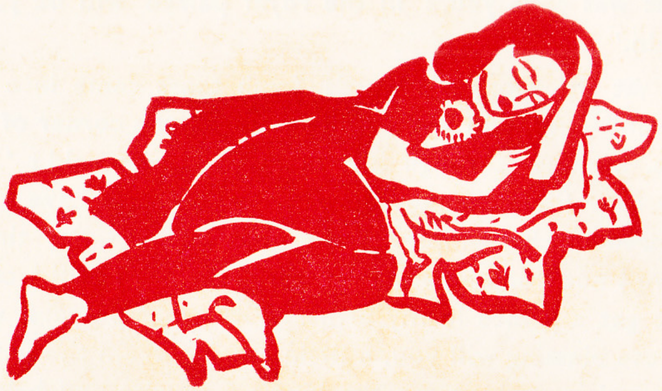
were wet with tears. The monkey of the wilds climbed into the queen's lap and, wiping the tears from her eyes, said : 'Mother, do not weep ; I will make you happy again ; I shall restore to you your palace with the seven courts. I will give you back your seven gardens and your seven hundred maids. I will seat you as queen beside the king in your golden temple with a moon-faced prince in your arms. Only then shall I deserve my name 'Monkey.' If you will do what I ask, then all the glory

that was once yours in the royal palace will be yours again.'

At the monkey's words, fresh tears came into the queen's eyes, and yet a smile stole to the corner of her lips. Smiling through her tears the queen said : 'Oh, my dear little monkey, how many sacrifices have I not offered in the temples of the gods ? How many times, have I not worshipped at the sacred shrines ? Still I could not get a prince in my arms. With what prayers, with whose blessing will you, a little monkey from the jungle, succeed in making me the king's favourite and bring a royal prince to my arms ? Let things be as they are, my little one. Let the Maharaja live in happiness. Let my rival bask in the sunshine of his love. Leave me to my sorrows. Do not try to do the impossible. It is getting late, my little one. Go to sleep.'

The monkey said : 'No, mother, if you don't listen to me I shall not go to sleep.'

The queen said : 'Oh, my child, please go to sleep ; it is late in the night ! Clouds are gathering in the east and west. The sky is rent with thunder and lightning and it will soon rain. Sleep has come over the whole kingdom. Sleep, my little monkey, sleep. To-morrow I shall listen to what you have to say. Now go to sleep. I have closed the door of the hut for a storm is blowing. It is cold, so I have spread the quilt in the middle of the room. Come, my little one, come into my arms and let us go to sleep.'



The monkey went to sleep with his head on the queen's breast while the queen went to sleep with her head on the torn quilt.

And so the night passed—with Suo Rani on a golden bedstead, on a bed of flowers beside the king ; and Duo Rani on the torn quilt in the broken-down hut, amids the wind and the rain.

The day dawned. In the royal palace, the bell rang in the watchman's tower. In the pipe-tower, the pipers began to play. The king and Suo Rani awoke from their sleep.

The king washed himself in crystal-clear water from a golden ewer, arrayed himself in his royal robes and went down to his durbar. And Suo Rani turned over on her golden bedstead while her maids fanned her to sleep again with a fan made of flowers.

And Duo Rani—what did she do ?

The golden sunlight streamed down on her face through a crack in the roof of the broken-down hut and she sat up. She looked this way and that, looked this side and that, but the monkey was nowhere to be seen ! The queen searched this corner of the room, she searched that corner of the room, searched the thatch of the hut, searched the branches of the trees outside but there was no sign of the monkey ! Duo Rani began to weep.

Where could the monkey have gone ?

The monkey had left the sleeping queen at daybreak and had gone to the royal durbar.

The king was seated in his audience chamber surrounded by his ministers and courtiers when the monkey arrived. Guards stood at the doors. On all sides there were crowds of people. The queen's monkey pushed through the crowd and, slipping past the guards, went up to the king. Bowing low at the feet of the king, he said : 'O Maharaj, I have brought very good news. My mother is going to have a son.'

The king said : 'What is this, monkey ? Is this true ? The elder queen—Duo Rani is going to have a son ? Beware ! If this proves to be false I shall have you beheaded. And the elder queen shall suffer the same fate.'

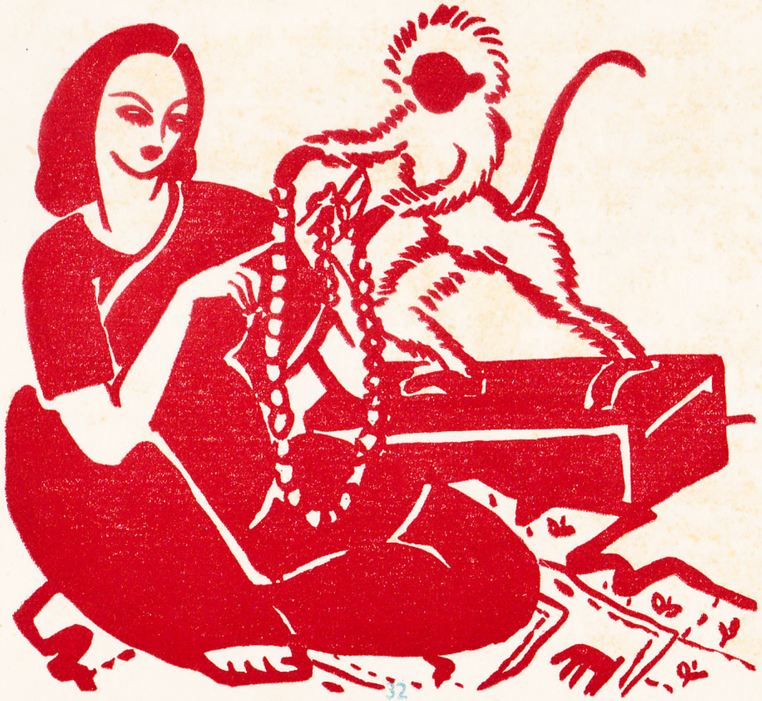
The monkey said : 'Maharaj, let that be on my own head. Now may I have my reward so that I can take my leave.'

The king unclasped a necklace of the richest pearls from his neck and gave it to the monkey.

Dancing gleefully, the monkey went back to the broken-down hut, to the weeping Duo Rani.

Wiping the tears from the eyes of the queen and brushing the dust off her clothes, the monkey said : ‘ Look, mother, look what I have brought for you. You are a king’s wife but you haven’t even a proper necklace to wear. Throw away that string of wooden beads and wear this chain of pearls !’

When she saw the necklace of elephant pearls the monkey was holding, the queen said : ‘ This necklace—where did you get it ? This is the king’s necklace of elephant pearls ! When I was the queen I strung it for him with my own hands. Where did you get it ? Did the king throw it away ? Did you pick it up on the highway ?’



The monkey said : ‘ No, mother, I did not pick it up. Can a necklace of elephant pearls, strung by your own hands and meant for the king be found lying about in the streets ?’

The queen said : ‘ Then did you steal it from the king’s chamber ?’

The monkey said : ‘ Come, mother, do you think I would steal ? To-day I gave the king some good news, so he gave me the necklace as a reward.’

The queen said : ‘ Oh, my little pet, you are the child of a sorrowing woman, a monkey of the wilds. You sleep in the arms of this sorrowing woman in her broken-down hut. What happy news did you have to give the king that before the night was over you rushed off to the royal palace ?’

The monkey said : ‘ Mother, I dreamt that I had been blessed with a brother—that a son was born to you and that the baby became the king and sat on the royal throne. That is why I ran to the king. I said to him : “Maharaj, my mother is going to have a son.” So the king was overjoyed and, unclasping the necklace round his neck, he gave it to me.’

The queen said : ‘ Oh my child, what have you done ? To-day you have told the king that a son will be born to the elder queen. Tomorrow he will know it is a lie. To-day the king has given you a necklace. To-morrow he will give orders for our necks to be cut. Alas ! what have you done ? At least I get a morsel of rice to eat and am allowed this corner to live in. And once in a while I get a glimpse of the king. But now I shall be denied even that ! Oh dear, what a terrible misfortune you have caused ! Why did you spread this false news ? Why have you brought this new trouble on me ?'

The monkey said : ' Mother, don't be afraid and don't worry. Just keep quiet for ten months. Let everyone think the elder queen is going to have a baby. Then, when the king wants to have a look at his son, I shall place a moon-faced child in your arms. Now come, it is late and I am hungry.'

The queen said : ' Come my little one, come. I have filled your bowl with water. I have brought fruits from the trees for you. Come and eat.'

The queen sat down and seated the monkey on a broken stool and fed him on wild fruits and water.

And the king went to the apartments of the younger queen.

Having had a bad dream, Suo Rani was seated on her golden bed deep in thought, when the king came in. ' Have you heard,' he said, ' that the elder queen is going to have a child ? Now at last all my worries are at an end. If a son is born to Duo Rani I shall have an heir to the throne. And if a daughter is born then I shall give her in marriage and hand over the kingdom to my son-in-law.

This has been worrying me for so long. Now at last my mind is at rest.'

The queen said : ' Don't you think I have enough troubles of my own that you come bothering me with other people's affairs !'

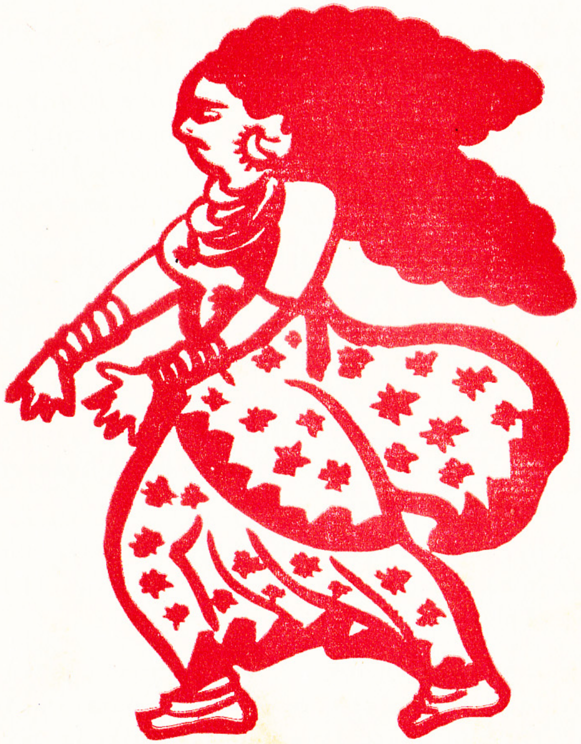
The king was amazed. He said : ' What do you mean, Rani ? On such a happy day as this, is it proper for you to say such things ? I shall hold a royal prince in my arms; I shall set him on the throne. Dare anyone make a wry face over such news ? Queen, in the royal household, every face is smiling. Why does yours wear a scowl ?'

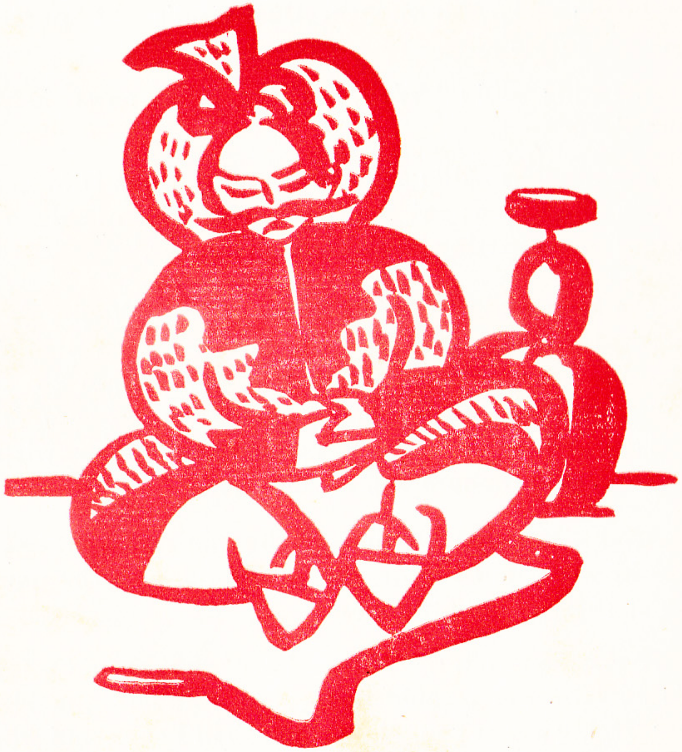
The queen said : ' This is unbearable ! Do you expect me to worry my head over whose son is going to be king, whose daughter will inherit the kingdom, who is going to sit on the royal throne ? I am not concerned with whether someone else's child lives or dies. It is disgusting —all this prattle so early in the morning. I haven't been able to sleep a wink and now I have got a headache. Let me go and have my bath.'

Angrily, the young queen walked away, her eight pairs of bracelets jingling and her ten pairs of anklets jangling as she went.

The king was furious. ' The younger queen dares to mention Death and the royal prince's name in the same breath ?' The king's face darkened. He walked away to the outer apartments.

A quarrel thus arose between the king and his younger queen. The king did not come to see his Suo Rani any





more. But neither did he go to see Duo Rani, for fear the younger queen should hear of it and poison her. The king remained alone in his outer apartments. A month, two months, three months, four months went by but the king and the queen did not make up their quarrel.

During the fifth month, Duo Rani's pet monkey went to see the king.

The king said : ' Well, monkey, what news do you bring ?'

The monkey said : ' Maharaj, my mother is in great sorrow. She cannot eat the coarse rice which is given to her and she is getting weak through hunger.'

The king said : ' I didn't know of this. Wazir, go to the royal kitchens and send the finest rice on a golden plate and fifty different curries in gold dishes to the elder queen. And from to-day she will eat the same food that is served to me. And now reward the monkey with a thousand gold mohurs and let him go.'

After dismissing the monkey, the minister went to the royal kitchen, and the monkey came back to the queen with the bag of gold mohurs.

The queen said : ' Where have you been to-day ? It is so late and I could not go to bathe in the river for worrying about you. Now when shall I cook and when shall we eat ?'

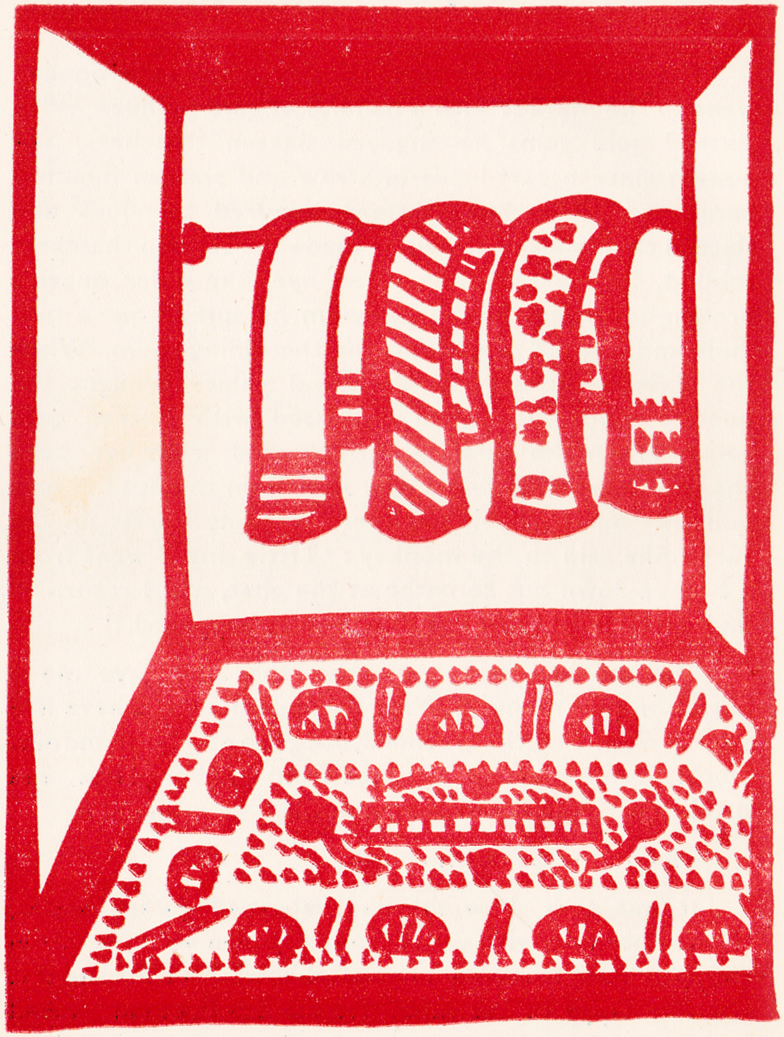
The monkey said : ' Mother, you will not have to cook any more. From the royal palace will come the finest rice and fifty curries in golden dishes. Go quickly and have your bath.'

The queen went to bathe in the river while the monkey went to the market with a handful of gold mohurs. With sixteen gold coins he engaged sixteen thatchers, and bought sixteen cart-loads of straw and sixteen hundred bamboos. With those sixteen hundred bamboos and sixteen cart-loads of straw, he made the sixteen thatchers rebuild, in the twinkling of an eye, the elder queen's broken-down hut. In the bedroom he spread out a new quilt and bought new stools for the dining-room. When the sixteen cooks from the royal palace brought the queen's food, they were dismissed with sixteen gold coins. When the elder queen returned from her bath she was amazed to find a new thatch on the hut ! A new quilt lay on the floor and there were new saris on the rack ! She said to the monkey : ' Little one, I went from a broken-down hut to bathe at the ghat, and I return to find a new hut ! How has this miracle happened ?'

The monkey said : ' Mother, the king gave me a bagful of gold mohurs. With those gold coins I have had your broken-down hut mended, bought a new quilt and new stools. Come and eat hot rice from golden plates, and drink warm milk from golden bowls.'

The queen sat down to eat.

It was ages since she had eaten off golden plates, washed her face with water from a golden ewer, or eaten chopped betel from a golden betel-bowl. And yet she was not too happy in her mind. As she ate the food cooked



in the royal kitchen she kept thinking : 'To-day the king has sent me rice on a golden plate ; to-morrow, maybe, he will take me to the jungle and have my head cut off.'

And thus she lived with fear always at her heart. And one month, two months, three months passed. The new hut again became old. There were holes in the thatch, and the straw of the thatch was scattered in the wind. Once more the monkey went to see the king.

The king said : 'Well, monkey, now what brings you here ?'

The monkey said : 'Great king, shall I speak without fear ?'

The king said : 'Speak fearlessly.'

The monkey said : 'Great king, in the broken-down hut my mother suffers greatly. There are cracks in the door, no straw on the thatch and the cold of the winter penetrates into the room. My mother has no quilt to cover her body with, no wood to light a fire, and she lies shivering through the night.'

The king said : 'True, true. Someone ought to have told me about this before ! Bring your mother to the royal palace. I shall give orders that it be got ready for her immediately.'

The monkey said : 'Great king, I am afraid to bring my poor mother here. The younger queen may poison her.'

The king said : 'Do not be afraid. I shall keep the elder queen in a new palace. Around the palace I shall have a moat dug. At the bridge over the moat I shall put guards. The younger queen will not be able to enter the palace. The elder queen alone will live there.'

The monkey said : ' Maharaj, I shall go and fetch my mother.'

The king said : ' Go, Wazir, get the new palace ready for the elder queen.'

The minister engaged thousands and thousands of men and got the elder queen's apartments ready and decorated in a day.

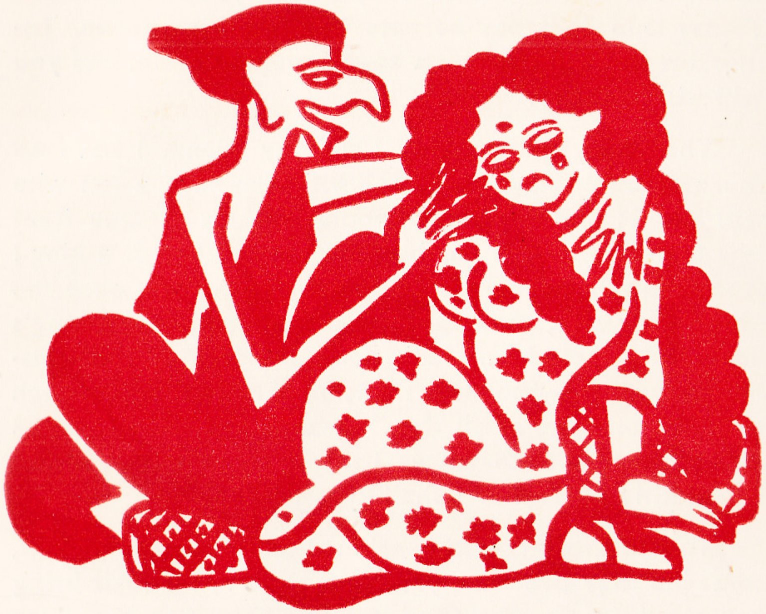
The elder queen left the broken-down hut and the torn quilt and, dressed in a golden sari, came to the new palace. She slept on a golden bedstead, ate off golden plates and gave alms to the needy. And there was rejoicing in the kingdom.

Only the young queen was burning with rage. She sent for her dearest friend—a Brahmani witch whom she called ' Heart's Own Speech.'

At the queen's summons, the old witch arrived at once.

The queen said : ' Come, my Heart's Own Speech, how are you ? Come and sit by me.'

The Brahmani witch sat beside the younger queen and said : ' What is it, my dear queen ? Why have you called me ? Why do you look so sad ? There are tears in your eyes ! What is the matter ? What ails you, Rani ?'



The queen said : ' What ails me, indeed ! What is the matter ? Everything is the matter. The elder queen is once again in favour. The king has had a new palace built for her. She wears a golden sari. She has become the king's favourite queen again—that beggar-woman Duo Rani has become queen over the Suo Rani and is in full possession of the entire household ! My friend, my heart is burning at the sight of all this. Give me some poison to take. I cannot bear to see all this love showered on Duo Rani.'

The Brahmani witch said : ' For shame, friend, you should not talk like that. Why should you take poison ? To-day Duo Rani has become the favourite queen. To-morrow she will become a beggar-woman again, and you will still be the favourite.'

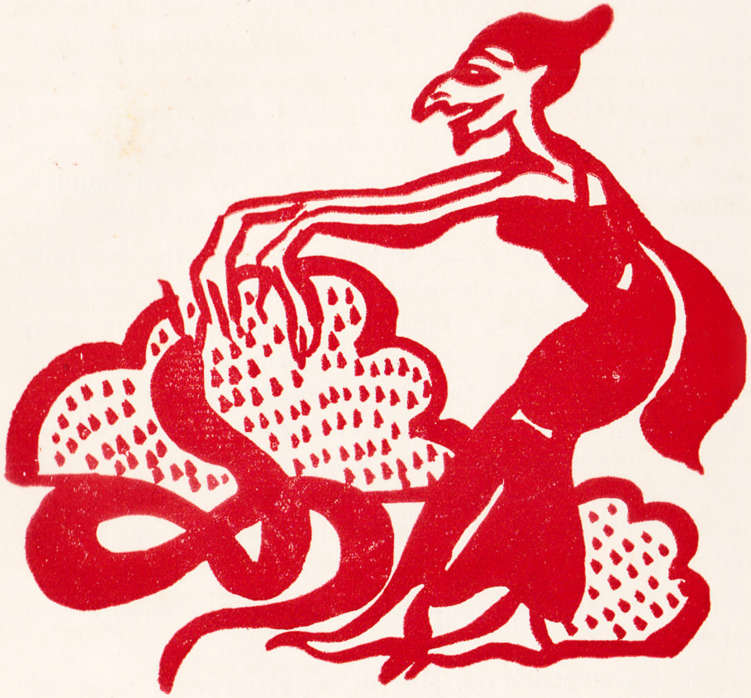
The young queen said : ' No, my friend, I have no more desire to live. Duo Rani will soon have a son who will inherit the kingdom ! People will say : " Duo Rani is a true queen—she has become the mother of a king ! And as for that cinder-faced Suo Rani, who was once the king's favourite, she could not place a son in the king's arms. One should not look upon the face of that miserable creature—the mere mention of her name is enough to make one starve all day." Dear friend, I will not be able to stand such disgrace. Give me some poison. Either I shall kill my rival or I shall kill myself.'

The Brahmani witch said : ' Calm yourself, Rani, someone may overhear you. Don't worry ! I shall bring you the poison secretly and you can give it to the elder queen. I shall go now in search of the poison.'

The queen said : ' Go, sister, but see to it that the poison is so deadly that as soon as Duo Rani takes it she will fall down and die.'

The witch said : ' Have no fears, dear. The day after to-morrow I shall poison the elder queen, and her hopes of being a mother will be ended forever. So do not worry any more.'

The witch went in search of poison in the heart of the twilight. After searching for a long time in several forests, she bewitched a black cobra sleeping beside a bush, took out the venom from its fangs, and brought it to Suo Rani.



The younger queen made some laddoos and other sweets and mixed the poison into them. Having arranged them on a platter, she said to the Brahmani witch: 'Friend, go and sell these poisoned sweets to the elder queen.'

The Brahmani went to Duo Rani's new palace with the poisoned sweets.

The elder queen said : ' Welcome, Brahmani. Where have you been all this time ? Did you forget poor Duo Rani ?'

The witch said : ' How could I ever forget you ? Whatever I eat and drink and wear is yours. Look, I have made all these sweets for you with my own hands—laddoos, caramels of various shapes, cakes and toffee.'

The queen was pleased when she saw the carefully arranged sweets on the platter and dismissed her with two handfuls of gold coins. The Brahmani went away laughing. The queen broke a bit from one of the milk caramels and put it into her mouth. All taste went from her tongue. She ate a bit of the laddoo and her throat dried up like wood. She took a bite of the cake and her heart seemed to burn within her. Calling the monkey, she said : ' What did the Brahmani make me eat ? How giddy I feel ! I think I am going to die !'

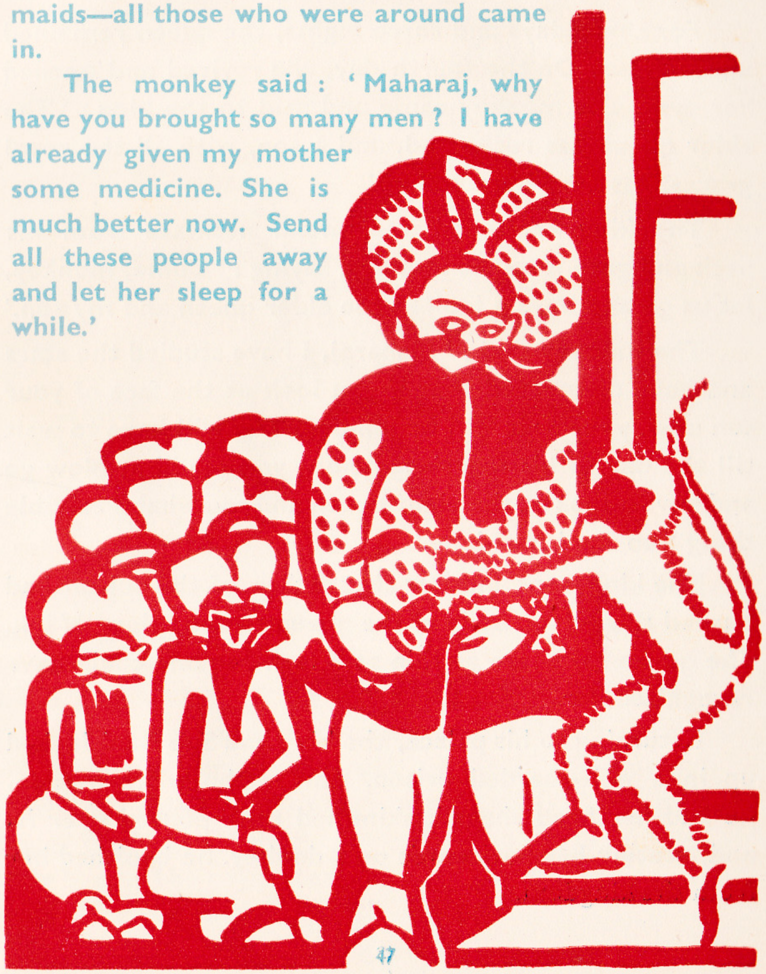
The monkey said : ' Lie down, mother, you will soon feel well again.'

The queen stood up. The snake poison went up to her head. Darkness floated before her eyes. She felt dizzy. Like a golden image, she toppled down on to the floor.

The monkey laid the queen's head on his lap, held her hand and felt her pulse ; he opened her eye-lids and looked at her eyes, but the queen lay deathly still. The monkey laid the golden image of the queen on the golden bed and ran to the woods in search of medicine. He brought from the woods who knows what leaves and creepers and the roots of what trees ? Grinding them with a new pestle in a new mortar, he gave the brew to the elder queen.

The news reached the royal palace that the elder queen had been poisoned. The king came hurrying to the queen's apartments. The king's minister came running after him. Then came all the king's men and maids—all those who were around came in.

The monkey said : ' Maharaj, why have you brought so many men ? I have already given my mother some medicine. She is much better now. Send all these people away and let her sleep for a while.'



The king had the poisoned sweets examined by the royal physician. Then he put the kingdom in charge of his minister and stayed in the apartments of the elder queen.

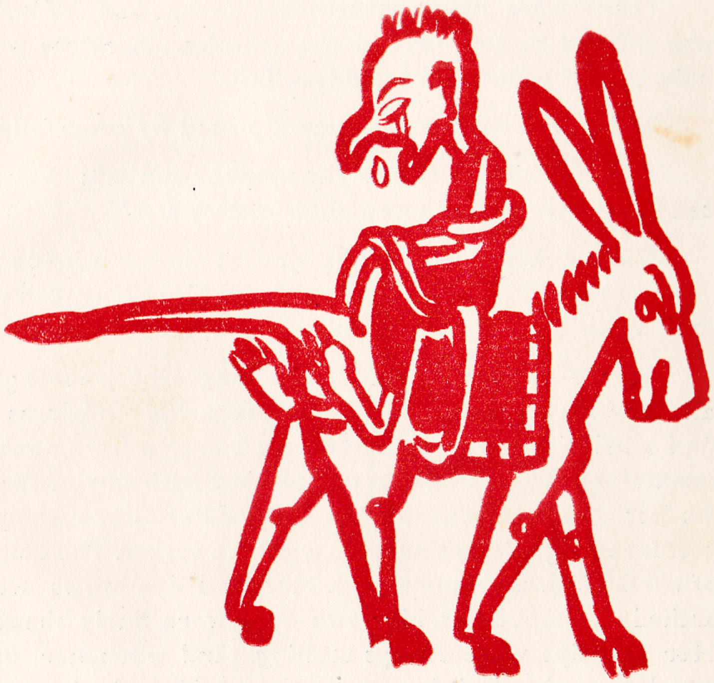
For three days and three nights, the queen remained unconscious. On the fourth day, she revived and opened her eyes. The monkey came and said to the king : ' The elder queen has recovered, and a son, with all the royal graces, has been born to her.'

The king unclasped a diamond necklace from his neck and gave it to the monkey, saying : ' Come, monkey, let us go and have a look at the elder queen and my son.'

The monkey said : ' Maharaj, I have studied the stars and have discovered that if you look at the face of your son now, your eyes will be blinded. You will have to wait till the day of his marriage before you see him. Now go and have a look at the elder queen and see what a terrible thing Suo Rani has done.'

The king went and saw that a fire of the poison had burned the golden body of the queen to the colour of ink. The queen lay there as thin as a leaf. No one could have recognised her.

Returning to his palace, the king had Suo Rani locked up in a well-guarded prison. As for the witch-woman, he had her head shaved, skimmed milk poured over it, and, seating her backwards on a donkey, he banished her from the kingdom.



Then he said to his minister : ' Wazir, this is a very happy day. After waiting so long I have at last been granted the gift of a royal prince. Have all the streets lit up, and fireworks let off from every house. Call the poor and needy and give them everything from the royal stores. Let there not remain a single beggar in the kingdom.'

At the orders of the king, the minister had all the streets of the town lit up ; fireworks were let off from every house. The royal stores opened out to the poor and needy. And the whole kingdom rejoiced.

There were new amusements every day. Worship was offered to the gods in the temples. Sacrifices were offered at the feet of the goddess Kali.

And in this manner ten years passed by peacefully.

Then the king called for the monkey and said : ' Look, ten years have passed ; now show me my son.'

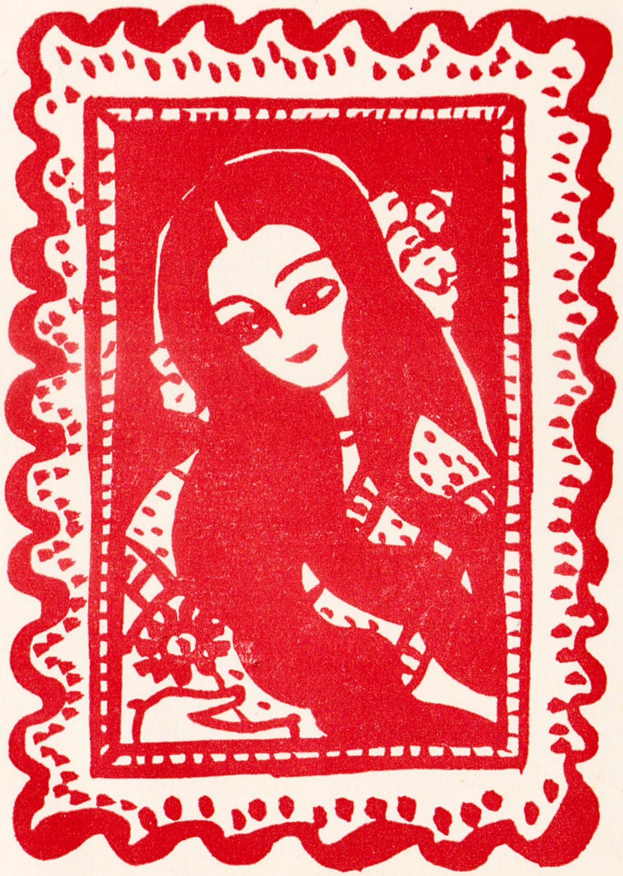
The monkey said : ' Maharaj, first choose a bride for your son and celebrate his marriage. Only then can you look at his face. If you look now you will surely go blind.'

At the monkey's words, the king sent messengers all over his land and to the neighbouring kingdoms to find a bride for his son. Suits were brought from several countries but the king was not pleased with any of them. At last, the messenger of the king of Patali brought the picture of a golden princess in a golden casket. The colour of her body was of pure gold. Her two eye-brows were arched like bent bows. Her two eyes were finely shaped. Her two lips were always smiling. And when her hair was loosened it fell down to her feet. The king's choice fell on that princess.

Sending for the monkey, he said : ' I have selected a bride for the prince. To-morrow, I go to celebrate the marriage on an auspicious day at an auspicious hour.'

The monkey said: 'Maharaj, send bearers with the palanquin for the bridegroom to his mother's house to-morrow evening. I shall escort the bridegroom to the wedding.'

The king said : ' Look out, monkey ! For ten long years



I have listened to your words. If you do not show me my son to-morrow, I shall lose all patience with you.'

The monkey said : ' Great king, have no fear. Just go along to the house of the bride's father, and I shall follow with the bridegroom to-morrow.'

For fear that he might look at the queen's son and be blinded, the king went away quickly to the house of the bride's father.

And the monkey went to the palace of the elder queen.

Ever since she had heard of the marriage of her son, the elder queen had lain in bed weeping. ' Where am I to get a son now ?' she kept thinking. ' How can I go on deceiving the king ?'

The monkey came and said : ' Mother, dear mother, please get up. Get some robes of red silk and a head-dress for the bridegroom, and make a caramel doll. He shall be the bridegroom and we shall get him married.'

The queen said : ' My dear little one, have you no fear for your life ? How can you dare to dress up a caramel doll and make him a bridegroom ? With what wiles will you now dupe the king ? My dear one, there is no need to go further with this. I regained the king's favour through deceit. For that my rival poisoned me. By good fortune, my life was spared ; but how dare I deceive the king again ? My dear little monkey, let us not deceive anyone now. Why increase my load of sins ? Go and call the king. Let me tell him the truth.'

The monkey said : ' But where shall I find the king ?

It is a two days' journey from here to the bride's kingdom, and the king has gone there. Just do what I say and make me a caramel bridegroom. The king is there waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom, and if he does not arrive it will be a great disgrace. Don't worry, mother. Send your caramel son to be married. And if the Mother-goddess Shasti, guardian of all children, be merciful, you will hold in your arms your own darling child.'

The queen took heart at the monkey's assurance and moulded a caramel doll after her own heart. She dressed him in the silk robes of a bridegroom, placed a golden head-dress on his head, and put gold embroidered shoes on his feet. Then, when no one was looking, the monkey lifted the caramel bridegroom into the palanquin, and drew the coloured curtains so that only the bridegroom's two little feet, adorned with a pair of gold brocade shoes, could be seen. Sixteen carriers lifted the bridegroom's palanquin on their shoulders. With a turban on his head, a band neatly tied round his waist, with drums beating and flags waving and torches blazing, the monkey took the caramel doll to be married. The queen sat alone in the dark sanctums of her palace and prayed day and night to the Deliverer of all sorrows and troubles.

In the meantime, the sixteen carriers with the palanquin, the torch bearers with their torches, the drummers with their drums and the bridegroom's attendants on horseback, all arrived in Dignagar, with flutes playing and horses prancing and torches blazing.

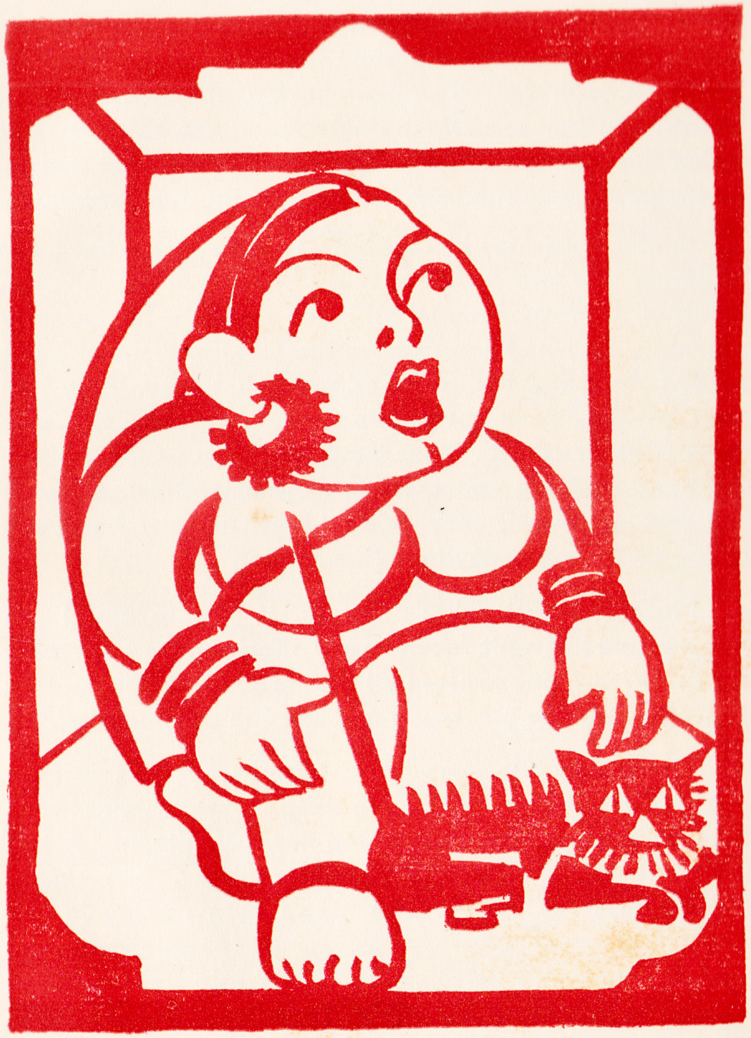
The day dawned by the big lake in Dignagar. The torches were burnt out. The horses began to gasp after their long run. The bearers were exhausted with carrying the palanquin. The drummers' fingers refused to move after beating the drums so long.

The monkey ordered tents to be erected by the side of the lake in the shade of the banyan tree, for here the goddess Shasti was enshrined. He had the palanquin lowered, and told the bearers to go. Calling the minister he said : 'Wazir Sahib, it is the order of the king that nobody is to look at the bridegroom for it is very unlucky for the bridegroom to be seen to-day.'

The minister had the king's order proclaimed by beat of drum. The king's men bathed in the waters of the lake, cooked and ate their meals, and lay down in their tents. They did not go near the banyan tree. The daughters and wives from the village came with their puja offerings to the goddess Shasti, but the guards of the king turned them away with shouts and cries. That day, no puja offerings were made to the goddess Shasti under the banyan tree. The goddess Shasti grew restless with hunger, and her throat was as dry as wood with thirst. The monkey smiled to himself.

And so the hours went by. Not a drop of water had passed Mother Shasti's lips. The goddess-mother became frantic seated in her shrine, and her black cat began to mew.

The monkey then thought of a plan. He left the door of the palanquin open and moved aside a little. Mother



Shasti thought: 'Ah! Good riddance!' And, coming out of her niche into the scorching heat of the sun, she began to look for the puja offering of corncakes and bananas. In her search, she discovered the caramel doll inside the palanquin. The goddess could control her hunger no longer. In her mind she called upon the Aunts of Sleep.

When it was day in Dignagar, it was night in the Land of Sleep. The two Aunts of Sleep had lulled to sleep the children of Mother Shasti all night through. In the early morning, they had returned to the Land of Sleep and put to bed the daughter of the king of that land. They had then barely closed their own eyes when the call came from Mother Shasti. The Aunts of Sleep woke up, left the Land of Sleep and came to Dignagar. Bowing low at the feet of Shasti, they said: 'Mother, why have you called us in broad daylight?'

Mother Shasti said: 'Sisters, it is late and I am hungry, and I haven't received any offerings. Do something for me. Please put to sleep all who are in this land so that I can go into the palanquin and eat the caramel doll.'

The Aunts felt sorry for old Mother Shasti so they put all the people in the land to sleep. The shepherd in the field fell asleep. The mother and her baby playing by her side fell asleep. The baby's elder sister, surrounded by her toys fell asleep. The king's men resting in the shade of the banyan tree fell asleep. All the children in the village school fell asleep. The king's minister with the hookah in his mouth fell asleep. The village school-master with the cane in his hand fell asleep. In the middle of the

day, night came to Dignagar. The Aunts sent sleep to everyone's eyes. Only the animals kept awake—the dogs and the jackals in the village streets, the king's elephants and horses by the big lake, the wild birds in the heart of the forest, and the queen's monkey in the branches of the banyan-tree, not to mention the wild cats, the water-cats, the tree-cats and the household cats. Shasti then took the caramel doll out of the palanquin. At the smell of the milk caramel, the tree-cats came down from the trees; the wild cats ran out of the wilds; the water-cats climbed out of the water; the house cats left their cosy corners and they all gathered round Shasti's shrine.

Old Mother Shasti gave the ten fingers of the caramel doll to the cats to eat. She herself ate up the caramel hands and arms, caramel legs and feet, the caramel body and head. And she gave the two caramel ears to the Aunts of Sleep and bade them good-bye. The Aunts went back again to the Kingdom of Sleep.

At the landing place by the big lake of Dignagar, the attendants of the bridegroom awoke from their sleep. In the village, in every cottage, the villagers awoke from their sleep. Old Mother Shasti wiped her mouth quickly and was going to climb into her shrine, when the monkey leapt down from a branch of the banyan tree and said: 'Old mother, where are you running away? First give me back my caramel boy! You have been caught red-handed stealing. I shall tell the whole world that you are a thief!'

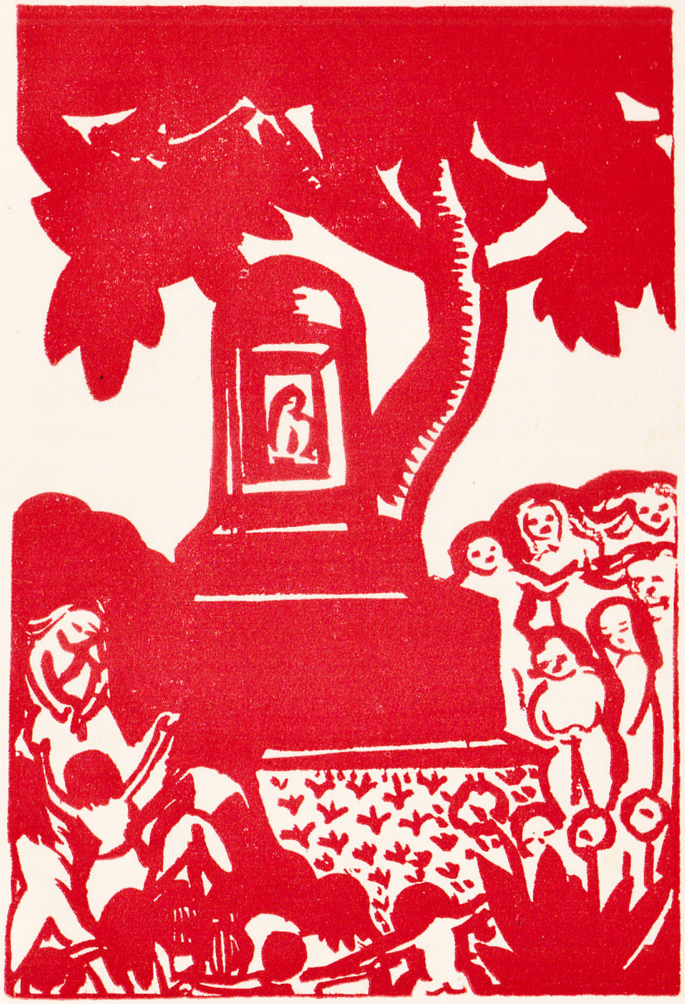
The old mother was frightened. 'What are you saying, cinder-face ? Go away ! Leave me alone ! People will see me ! Let me go.'

The monkey said : ' No, I won't let you go. First give me back my caramel boy. Then you can go. Otherwise I shall drown you and your altar in the waters of the lake. That will be a good punishment for a goddess caught stealing.'

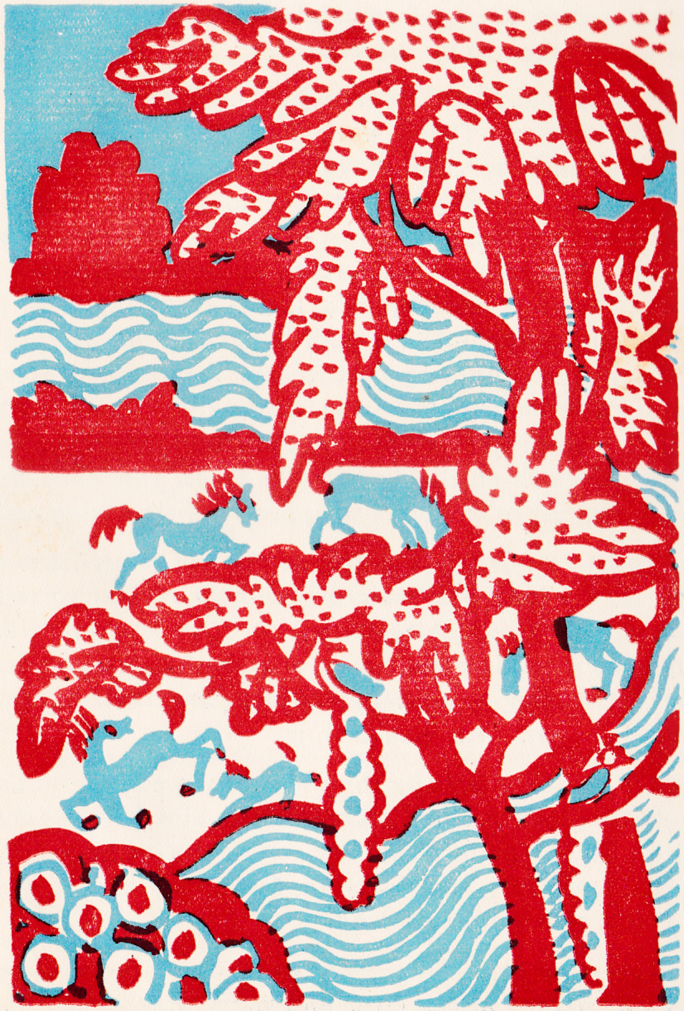
The old mother-goddess nearly died of shame. Trembling with fear she said : 'Dear monkey, please be quiet ; someone may overhear you ! I have eaten up your caramel boy, so how am I to give it back to you ? Under the shade of that banyan tree, my little boys are playing. Go and choose whichever one you like and take him to be married. Duo Rani will look upon him as her own son. And now, let me go.'

The monkey said : ' But old mother, I see no boys under the banyan tree. Give me the magic vision of the gods, only then will I be able to see the children of Mother Shasti.'

Old Mother Shasti passed her hands across the monkey's eyes, and the monkey was given the magic vision. He looked around and there by the shrine of Shasti was the Kingdom of Children. There were children indoors, children outdoors, children in the water, children on the land, children on the streets, by the side of the lake, on the branches of trees, on the green grass—there were boys and girls everywhere. Some were plain, some beautiful ; some were fair and some dark; some had anklets on their feet ; some had girdles round their waists ; some



had tiny golden beads round their necks; some were playing on their flutes; some were shaking their rattles; some were dancing about to the sound of their tinkling anklets, turning their soft little hands round and round; some had little red shoes on their feet ; some had little red caps on their heads; some had round their shoulders embroidered scarves of the softest muslin, costing lakhs of rupees; some were as thin as reeds and some were plump; some were naughty, some were good; some of the boys were riding on wooden horses and laughing gaily; some were fishing in the waters of the lake. One group had gone down to the edge of the waters to bathe; some were picking flowers, others were plucking fruit. Dancing and playing, fighting and squabbling, crying and laughing—children were everywhere. This was a strange land, a dream kingdom. There was only fun here, only games and play. There were no schools and no school-teachers and so there were no canes in the hands of the teachers. There were the black waters of the lake fringed by forests of reeds, stretches of wilderness and orchards of mangoes and jack-fruit. And on every tree were parrots and cockatoos with drooping tails. In the water swam round-eyed boal fish. In the caladium clumps fluttered swarms of butterflies, and on the outskirts of the forest lived the Aunts of the woodland village, who made sweets of pop-corn. A cuckoo fluttered on the pomegranate shrub by the side of a hut, and a nut-meg tree grew on the banks of the river. Blue horses grazed in the fields and golden peacocks strutted about the lanes and ghats. The boys saddled the blue horses and the golden peacocks and, accompanied



by the music of drums, timbrels and cymbals, they went to the Land of Orange Sweets where a sweet little princess was being taken to be married.

The monkey also went with them to the Land of Orange Sweets. There were lots of cockatoos there. Seated on their perches, they pecked at rice grain, cackled in the trees and played with the boys of the land. The people of that land ploughed the earth with cows and bullocks and rubbed their teeth clean with diamonds! It was a strange world indeed. In the twinkling of an eye the dawn broke, and in a flash it became dusk again. In that kingdom the strangest things happened. Through the shimmering sands flowed a sparkling brook on the banks of which a crowd of boys came fishing. The sunlight streamed down on their moon-like faces, and when tired they slept out in the open wrapped in their fishing nets.

Then drip-drop, drip-drop, came the rains. Tides ran high on the river and the crowd of boys rushed home for shelter. As they ran, kites swooped down and stole their fish, and frogs jumped up to snatch their fishing rods. The little men went home furious, and their mothers consoled them with cooled milk.

On the dry sands by the shimmering water, old Lord Shiva came and beached his boat. With him were his three ladies. One of them cooked and served the food, the second ate up everything and the third, feeling left out, went off in a huff to her father's land.

The monkey also went with her. There, lovely maidens bathed in the river and were shaking dry their

ebony black hair on the ghat. From either side of the steps floated up two carps—the king of the fishes. A priest caught hold of one and a cockatoo who came sailing along seized the other. A weasel, seeing this, snatched up the cockatoo with one hand and the fish with the other and began to dance. In the doorway of a house, a mother with her child on her knees sang :—

'Weasel ! O Weasel ! Just stop your prancing;
'Turn around and see my boy dancing.'

The monkey looked at the boy and found he was lovely—as beautiful as a golden moon. He snatched up the child and lo, the dreamland of Mother Shasti vanished before his eyes.

The flight of cockatoos made the blue sky green as they flew away to some unknown land. Lord Shiva's boat floated away. The maidens on the ghats draped their striped saris round themselves and faded into thin air. The weasels dancing under the tamarind trees disappeared amongst the leaves. The whole of that magic kingdom of Mother Shasti seemed to sink into the earth.

The monkey looked around. Where was old Mother Shasti ? And where indeed were they all ? There he was, standing under the banyan tree beside the lake, with the boy in his arms.

The monkey called the king's men and placed the moon-faced boy in the palanquin. Then, with torches blazing and drums beating, the wedding procession left Dignagar in the twilight.

Meanwhile, in Patali land, in the house of the bride's parents, the king was wondering why the monkey had not yet arrived. 'Is he playing a trick on me ?' he thought, 'When I return to my kingdom I shall have him beheaded.'

The bride was thinking : 'I wonder what the bridegroom looks like ?'

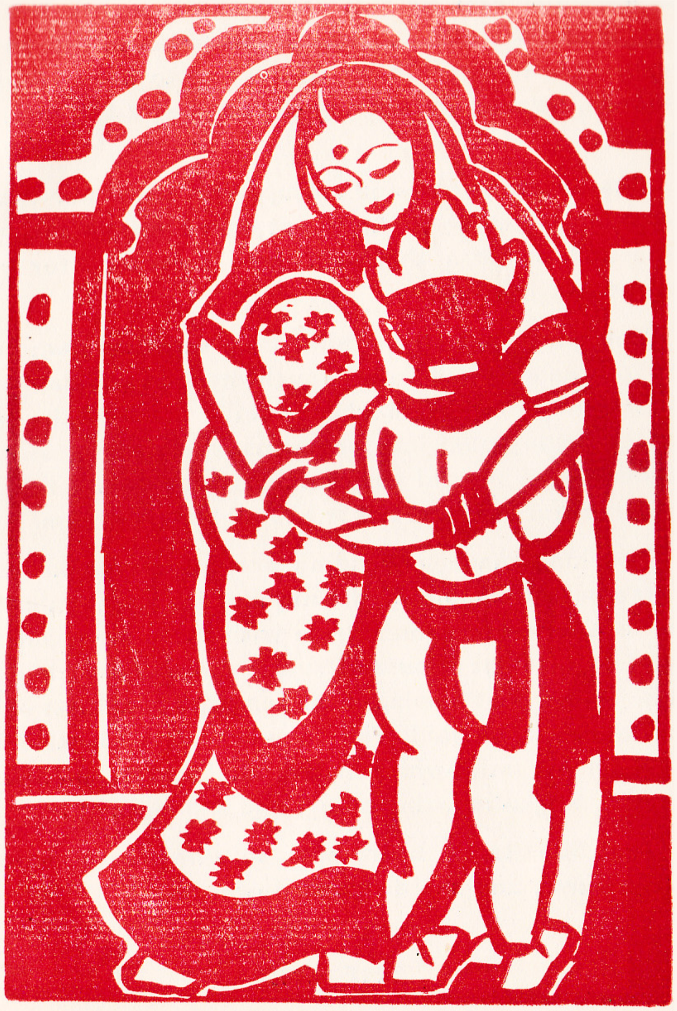
The mother and father of the bride were thinking : 'Alas, our heart's darling will become some one else's and will go away to an unknown home.'

The servants and maid-servants of the king were thinking : 'When will all the work be over so that we can go up on the terrace to have a look at the bridegroom ?'

Just then, dhum-dhum-dhum to the pounding of drums, peep-peep-peep to the piping of flutes, thud-thud-thud to the hoof-beats of horses, the monkey arrived with the bridegroom. The king led his son by the hand and seated him in the midst of the assembly. The father of the bride gave his daughter's hand to the bridegroom. The wedding guests hailed the bridegroom with joy. The servants blew the conches and from all sides resounded the 'Ulu-ulu-ulu,' bringing good fortune to the newly married couple.

The next day, to the music of flutes, the king set out for his kingdom on horseback, with his son and his daughter-in-law and the monkey.

The palace of the king of Patali was left desolate, for the beloved daughter, so long the joy of her mother and father, had gone off to another land.



Meanwhile, in our king's capital, the elder queen had wept and wept for two days and two nights. She had thought and thought and had at last fallen asleep. In her dreams, old Mother Shasti was saying to her : 'Awake, O queen, awake ; the darling of your heart has returned home.'

The queen awoke and sat up. She heard her maids-in-waiting say to her, 'Rani, put on your Puja sari, and come and perform the welcoming ceremony for your son and daughter-in-law !'

The queen put on her silk, Puja sari and came out. And lo ! the king had truly brought her son and daughter-in-law to her door. With a happy smile she drew the bride and the bridegroom into her arms. With the blessing of Mother Shasti she did not remember the caramel doll of her sorrowful days and felt it had all been a dream.

The king made a wedding present of the kingdom to his son, and appointed the monkey his prime minister. And he adorned his son's bride with those eight pairs of bracelets of eight thousand rubies from those charmed lands. On her feet he placed the ten pairs of anklets of ten hundred tolas of gold. The ruby bracelets sparkled like blood on her milk-white arms ; the anklets tinkled on her feet, ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling, and shone like fire.

And Suo Rani's heart was so filled with jealousy that it burst, and she dropped down dead.

THE END